

MontCo expands programs to fight gangs

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ROCKVILLE — The Montgomery County Council wants to stem the spread of gang activity by expanding after-school programs to county middle schools.

Marilyn Praisner, the council's vice president, announced

Tuesday a \$2.5 million proposal to expand the "Rec Extra" program, now at 10 middle schools, to all 38 middle schools in the county. The proposal would also expand it from three to four days a week.

"(After-school programs) contribute greatly to the well-being of youth," she said. "Besides providing a diversion from gang activity, research ... demonstrates that

after-school programs improve academic achievement and behavior in school ... while reducing youth crime and other risky behaviors."

The county's 2004 joint gang prevention task force called for implementing after-school programs.

The county's Rec Extra program offers a variety of different recreation and leisure activities

as well as traditional after school programs. Rec Extra activities include: baby-sitting instruction; sports such as flag football, lacrosse, basketball and tennis; and cartooning. The program also offers off-site activities including kayaking, overnight camping trips, rock climbing, whitewater rafting and caving.

The programs in all the middle schools would start in the fall.